Using American FactFinder

The purpose of this brochure is to show users how to obtain small-area data from the United States Census Bureau's "American FactFinder" web site. The Census Bureau's "American FactFinder" is an interactive tool for obtaining customized data from Census Bureau data files including the 1990 Census, the 2000 Census, the American Community Survey, and the Decennial Supplementary Surveys. However, some small-area summaries of 2000 Census data already are available from the Fairfax County web site. The geographies available include Fairfax County as a whole, planning districts, human services regions, and census designated places (CDPs). Simple maps indicating the boundaries of the small-areas are included as part of these summaries. All of these small-area summaries can be viewed in Adobe Acrobat PDF files and are located at *http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ comm/demogrph/2000DecennialCensus.htm*. However, if you need small-area Census data for areas not already summarized, you can use the Internet as a tool to obtain these data.

Getting Started

If you have access to the Internet, you can begin to define the geographies for which you want to collect data. Go to the County's Internet site which contains a Map Gallery located at *http://www.co. fairfax.va.us/maps/gallery.htm#*.

One option for developing customized small-area summaries is to use census tracts as building blocks. The first map shown at the top of the Map Gallery page is the Fairfax County Subcensus Map (Figure1). Fairfax County divides federal census tracts into subcensus tracts for analysis purposes. Although subcensus tracts are strictly Fairfax County designations, groups of subcensus tracts can be combined to comprise federal census tracts. On this map, the numerals to the left of the decimal point indicate the federal census tract (*160*.02) and the numerals to the right of the decimal point indicate the Fairfax County subcensus tract (160.*02*). To save room on the Fairfax County maps, the number "4" is dropped from the start of all federal census tract numbers. For example: subcensus tracts 160.01, 160.02, and 160.03 comprise the U.S. Census Bureau census tract number 4160.

Figure 1: Subcensus Map

The Subcensus Map can be viewed in its entirety or a quadrant at a time. Because of its size, it may be easiest to use one quadrant at a time. Click on
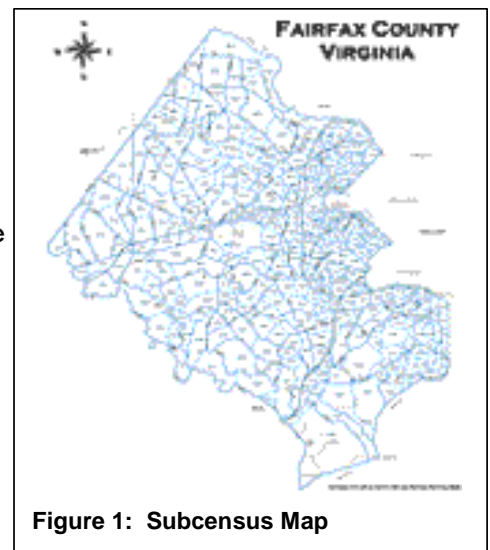
a quadrant to view the area of the County in which you are interested and note the census tracts for which you would like Census data (remember, you combine subcensus tracts to get a census tract).

If census tracts are larger than your area of interest or you need a different type of geography, such as a zipcode area, you can obtain alternative geographies from the Census Bureau's web site, which has some mapping abilities. To define an area smaller than a census tract, use the census tract number from the Fairfax County Subcensus Map to gather either block or block group information from the Census Bureau's web site. The Census Bureau's block group boundaries loosely resemble the County's subcensus tract boundaries. Rough maps of these block group areas can be obtained using the Census Bureau's web site. Zipcodes are another geography for which Census data are available from the Census Bureau web site. A map of Fairfax County zipcodes can be found on the second page of the Fairfax County Map Gallery described above. Be careful using zipcode geography as Fairfax County shares some zipcode areas with neighboring jurisdictions.

Selecting the Data Set

To access the "American FactFinder" tool, click on it from the Census Bureau's main page - *http://www.census.gov/* - or go directly into it using this address - *http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html*.

The "American FactFinder" home page is shown in Figure 2. The page is organized with general information on the right and a menu on the left. From the menu, users can select among many different Census products in order to obtain data for various geographies. You may be able to find the data for the geography you desire by using the Fact Sheet, People or Housing selections from this menu. However, if multiple geographies or customized, detailed data are needed, the Data Sets option should be used. To begin this tutorial, select the Data Sets option from the menu.

This will take you to the Census Bureau's Data Sets page (Figure 3). Across the top of the web page are tabs for other surveys. By clicking on one of these tabs, you can switch to a listing of the associated data sets for each survey.

Figure 2: American FactFinder Home Page

In the current view, all of the Decennial Census data sets are displayed, with the Census 2000 SF1 data set highlighted and bulleted. The other Census 2000 data sets are listed below the SF1 data set. Summary Files 1 and 2 are 100 percent data, and contain data collected from the Census short form on all persons. These data sets, sometimes referred to as complete count data, contain information on total population, age, race, ethnicity, and household relationships. Summary Files 3 and 4 are sample data, and contain inferential data based on samples collected by the Census long form. These data sets contain socio-economic information such as employment characteristics, income, and housing costs.

Figure 3: Data Set Page

Click on the radio button to the left of the Census 2000 SF3 data set. A menu appears to the right that allows you to select from a number of options. In the menu, the second to the last option is called "About this Data Set." If this option is selected, a detailed description of the data set, its available geographies (different levels of geography are supported in the Census data sets), and a list of the tables in the data set will be displayed. In the "About this data set" option, you also can see what cross-tables are available—for example, age by income.

Two important avenues for obtaining data are the "Quick Tables" option and the "Detailed Tables" option. The "Quick Tables" option will provide predesigned summaries by selected geographies. The "Detailed Tables" option allows the user to define which variables and cross-tables are of interest in addition to selecting the level of geography. For this tutotial, we will use the "Detailed Tables" option. This will bring you to the Select Geography page shown in Figure 4 on the next page.

Selecting Geography

For "Choose a selection method", keep the defaulted "list" option and the drop down boxes will lead you through the possible array of selections. By clicking on the down arrow in the "Select a geographic type" box, you will get a menu of geographies. For this example, we will select several census tracts – so, from the drop down menu in the box, choose "...... Census Tract" as shown in Figure 4.
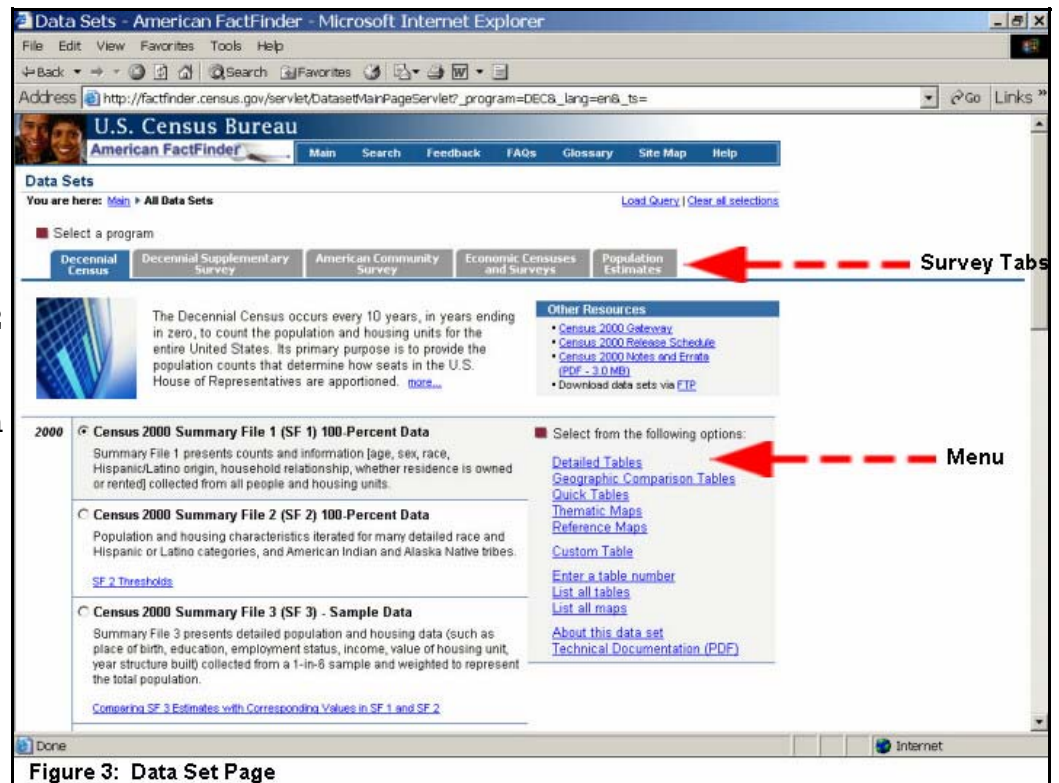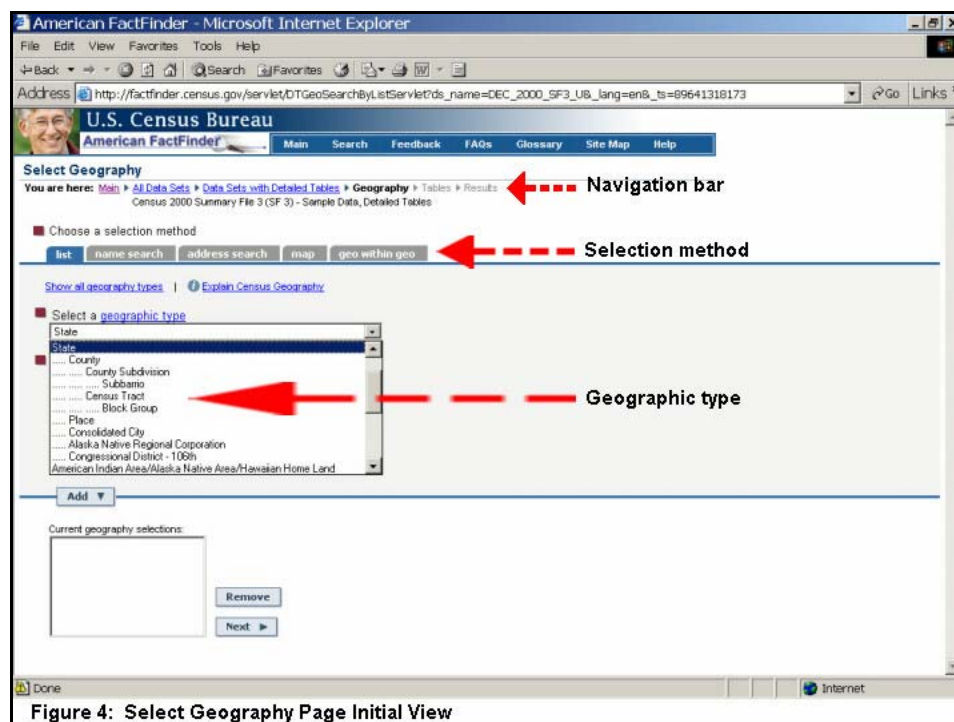
Figure 4: Select Geography Page Initial View

The Select Geography page will automatically reload – be sure that the page is completely re-loaded before proceeding. Each time a new selection is made from any of the boxes, the page will automatically reload. Do not attempt to proceed until the page has completely reloaded. The re-loaded page will contain a new drop down box option below the "Select geography type" box – this box will be labeled "Select a state." Because our example is using geographies for Fairfax County, choose Virginia from the drop down menu and again wait for the page to automatically reload. A new drop down box option will appear below the "Select a state" box – this box will be labeled "Select a county." Scroll down and select Fairfax County (Fairfax City is a separate jurisdiction). Once again, wait for the page to reload. The page should now look like the view shown in Figure 5.

The final step in selecting geography can now be done – select the desired census tracts in the "Select one or more geographic areas" box (Figure 5). To select more than one, but not all census tracts, hold down the control key while you select noncontiguous census tracts by clicking on them. A series of contiguous census tracts can be selected by holding down the shift key and clicking on the first and last census tract in the series. The selected census tracts should now be highlighted. Click on the "Add" button just below the selection box to add these to your request. Incorrect geographies can be removed by selecting (highlighting) them and clicking on the "Remove" button to the right of the current geographies selection box. If you do
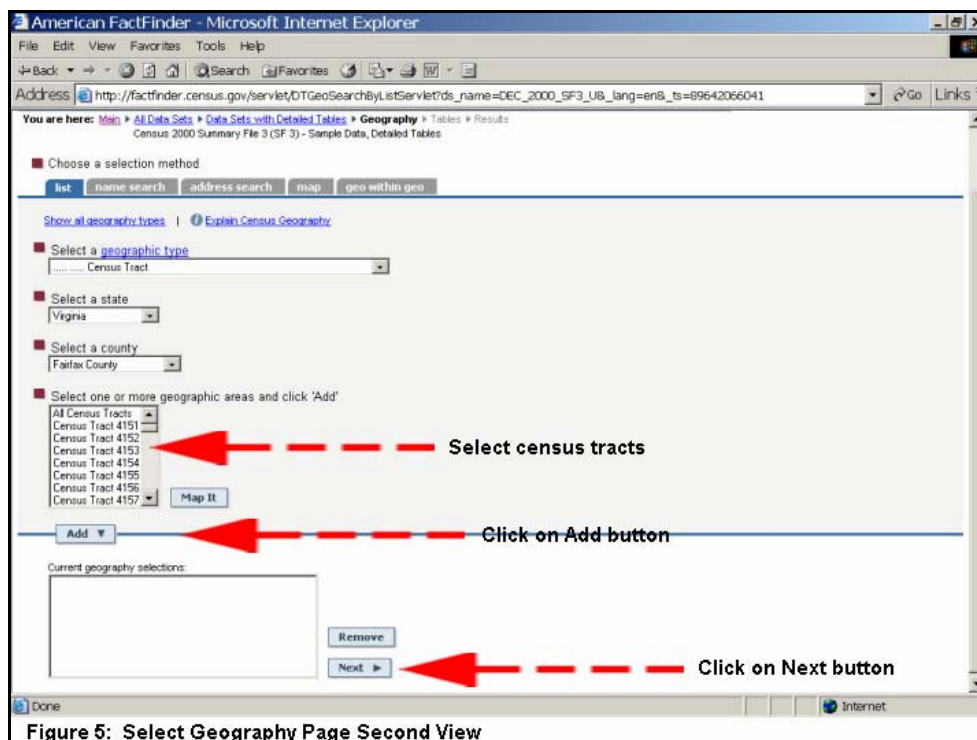

Figure 5: Select Geography Page Second View

not already know which census tracts you want, you can highlight a census tract in the "Select one or more geographic areas" box and click on the "Map It" button to the right. A map of the area you selected will be displayed. It is now time to select the information you want in your customized tables – click the "Next" button to the right of the current geography .

Selecting Tables

The table selection page should now be displayed in your browser window (Figure 6). At the top of this page, are three search options for finding data elements – "show all tables," "by subject," or "by keyword." The default option (show all tables) contains a comprehensive list of all items available. If you find this list overwhelming, you might try selecting the "by subject" or "by keyword" options. However, if you are not very familiar with Census Bureau terminology, you may not be successful in finding the data you desire with the "by subject" or "by keyword"

Figure 6: Select Tables Page

options. Regardless of which search option is chosen, the "What's this?" button to the right of the table selection box will show you a definition of the highlighted table's contents. For our exercise, we will use the search "by keyword" option. Click on the tab for search "by keyword." The page should reload automatically and a new option box will appear – "Enter a keyword and click Search." Type "income" into the box and click on the "Search" button. Wait for the page to reload.
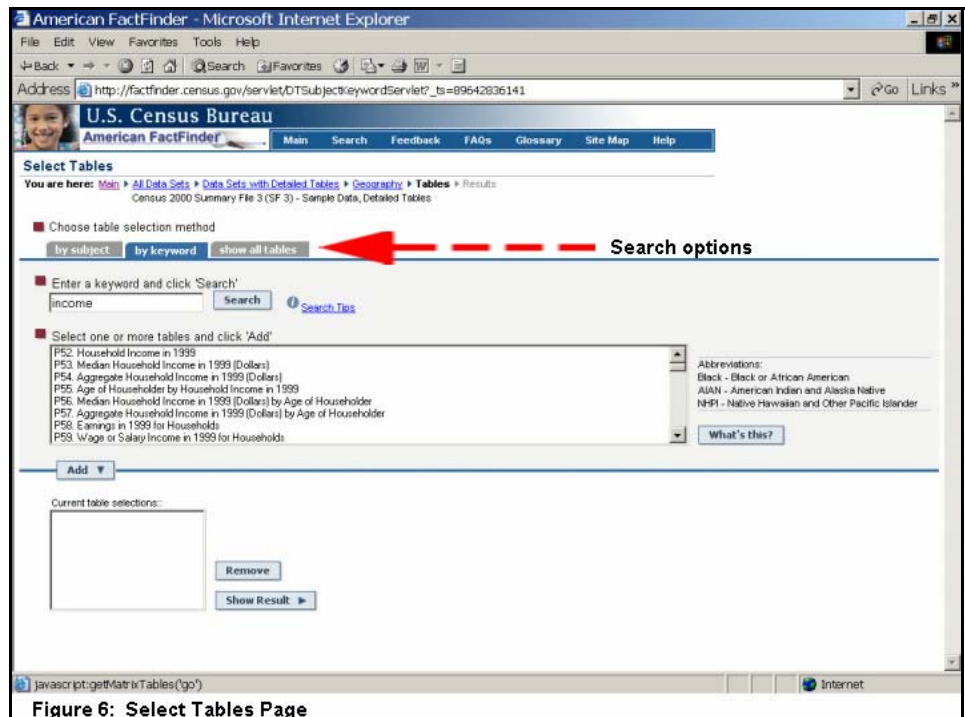
Select tables by scrolling through the "Select one or more tables" box. You can select more than one table by holding down your control key or your shift key. In this exercise, we will select two tables – "Household Income in 1999" and "Median Household Income in 1999 Dollars." After the desired tables are selected, click on the "Add" button below the selection box. To the right of this final box is a "Show Result" button – clicking on the "Show Result" button will take you to a screen showing the selected data tables and geographies.

Viewing and Printing Data

Data can be viewed, printed, or downloaded from the final Detailed Tables page (Figure 7 on the next page). In this exercise, more geographic areas have been selected than can be viewed on a single page. This is evidenced by the tag beneath the table title that says "geographies **1-10** of **13** Next." To

see the other geographies, click on the "Next" tag. To see the second data table, use the scroll bar on the right of the browser screen. You may click on the highlighted table titles to view documentation about the table.

Along the top of this page is the navigation bar that allows the user to modify data sets, geography, and table selections. When one of these navigation options is selected, the user is taken through a series of screens similar to those already discussed. Directly below the navigation bar is a menu bar that allows the user to change "Options,"

Figure 7: Detailed Tables Page

"Print/Download," and view "Related Items." The "Print/Download" menu option allows the user to print or download the data tables currently shown on the screen. Printing is straight forward, but downloading is slightly more complicated.
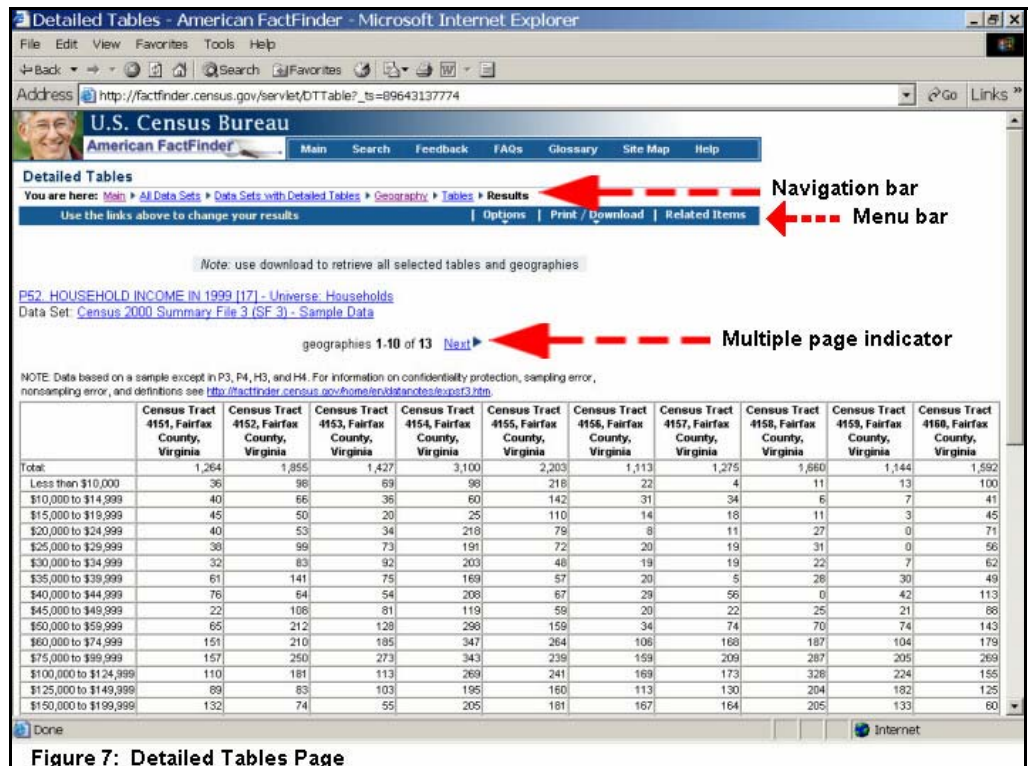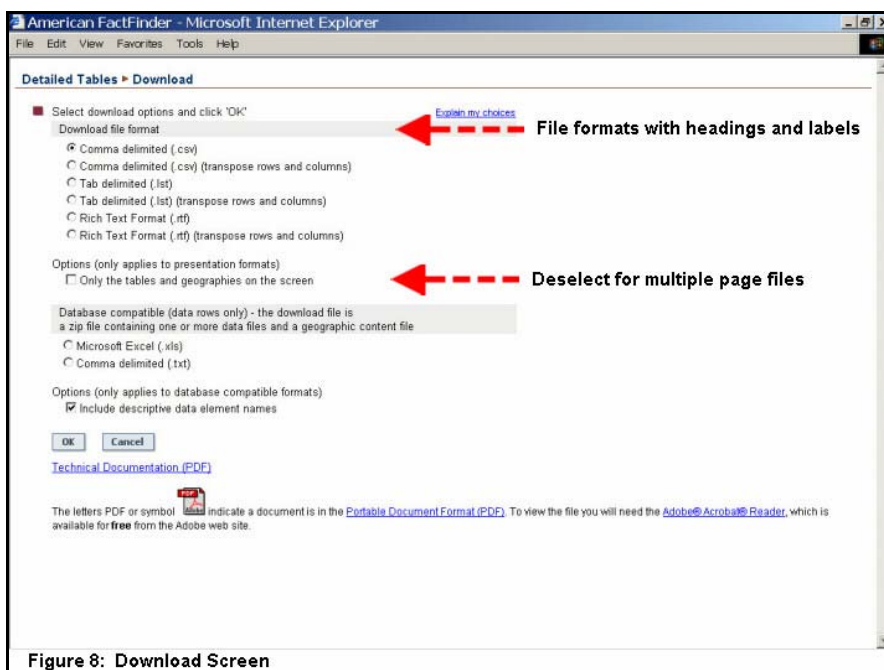

Figure 8: Download Screen

Downloading Data

From the "Print/Download" option on the blue menu toolbar at the top of the page in Figure 7, select "Download." A window will open allowing you to choose from several download formats (Figure 8). The "Download file format" selections at the top of this screen will download files containing titles, headings, footnotes, and sources. The "Database compatible" formats at the bottom of the screen will download data only one table at a time and use abbreviated variable names for the table elements. In addition, the "Database compatible" formats download compressed files that

then must be unzipped before they can be used. If you have limited knowledge of how Census files are organized and defined, it is recommended that you choose one of the file formats from the top section of the Download screen for your downloaded files. For this tutorial, we will use the default format – comma delimited (csv).

The csv format is easily recognized by Excel and other spreadsheet programs. If you prefer your geographies to go down a column and your data elements to be shown as column headings, you may want to choose the "comma delimited (csv) (transpose rows and columns)" option. In our example, the tables are displayed on multiple pages because we selected more geographies than could be displayed in a single view. If the "Only the tables and geographies on the screen" box is checked, only the page currently being viewed will be downloaded. To download the complete file, you need to de-select this box. Once your selections are made, click on the "Okay" button.

A pop-up box (Figure 9) will appear asking you if you want to open the file or save it. You can now save the file to one of your folders and open it later using Excel or another spreadsheet program or you can use Excel to open the file and then save from Excel.
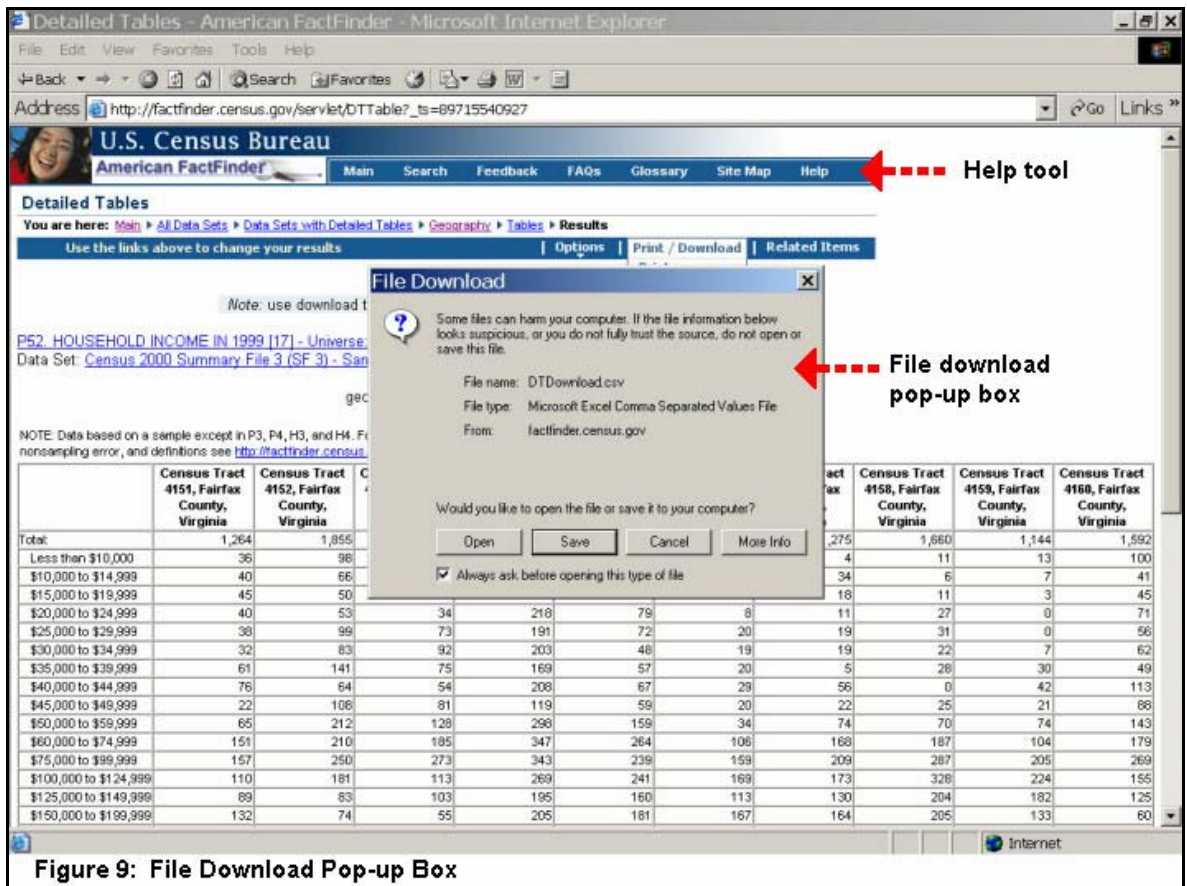

Figure 9: File Download Pop-up Box

This tutorial provides a basic knowledge of how to obtain data from the US Census Bureau's "American FactFinder" tool. Additional documentation and information on using the "American FactFinder" web site can be obtained from the help tool on the blue navigation banner at the top of each page.

Web Resources

Fairfax County, Virginia, Internet Site

- Home Page—*http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov*
- Demographic and Economic Information Home Page—*http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/aboutfairfax*
- Census Summaries—*http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/comm/demogrph/2000DecennialCensus.htm*
- Map Gallery—*http://www.co.fairfax.va.us/maps/gallery.htm#*

United States Census Bureau

- Home Page—*http://www.census.gov*
- American FactFinder—*http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html*

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Fax: 703-803-8598

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